



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

23 April 2021

Deputy Alan Farrell  
[alan.farrell@oireachtas.ie](mailto:alan.farrell@oireachtas.ie)

Our Ref: GM/Communications

**PQ17558/21: To ask the Minister for Health if additional resources will be assigned to oncology screening services within the HSE to clear the backlog of referrals Covid-19 has created; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

Invitations to cervical, breast and bowel screening have been paused at times of peak community transmission of COVID-19, in line with NPHET and government advice. This is similar to the approach taken internationally. The activity of the screening programmes has also been closely monitored, to ensure that capacity is available for the investigation of higher risk patients and of those presenting with symptoms.

Although screening capacity is increasing, some clinics and follow-up services are not yet operating at pre-pandemic capacity due to factors including challenges associated with requirements for physical distancing and infection prevention and control, and insufficient capacity for pre-pandemic levels of non-COVID care in the public system.

The NSS received €10m in 2021 for a range of screening developments, which include extra capacity in the screening programmes. The HSE as part of its allocation of funding for COVID, has also made additional funds available, if required, to address excess COVID-related costs. However, it is important to note that not all capacity difficulties can be addressed with this funding. For example, it takes up to ten years to train radiologists and radiographers, for which there is worldwide demand. With finite staffing resources worldwide we are focused on achieving a maximum invitation rate across our screening programmes that is compatible with a safe follow-up assessment, and the treatment capacity within the health service.

We continue to ask all people to be aware of symptoms, and to contact their GP if they have any concerns.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive, National Screening Service

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.  
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) [www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

